

## LCUSD DEI Recommendations for Sustainability: Final Report

### August 2020

*Developed by Elliott Educational Services LLC*

	RECOMMENDED STEPS	AREAS FOR GROWTH ADDRESSED	ASSETS TO LEVERAGE
DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP	Formally acknowledge, reckon with and work to heal from the role of “White flight” and systemic racism in the district’s founding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture of fear and/or silence</li> <li>• Limited diversity of students</li> <li>• Empathy development needed</li> <li>• Feelings of exclusion within greater La Cañada Flintridge community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of some existing challenges</li> <li>• Board and district commitment</li> <li>• Existing relationships with community organizations</li> </ul>
	Solidify and widely share district student values; DEI definitions, commitment statement, and vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture of fear and/or silence</li> <li>• Increased communication requested by parents and students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board and district commitment</li> <li>• Multilingual communication with parents</li> <li>• Family Learning Series</li> <li>• Avenues for communication of expectations</li> </ul>
	Compose and share overview of teacher expectations and rights (tied to district, state and federal policies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture of fear and/or silence</li> <li>• Increased communication requested by parents and students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board and district commitment</li> <li>• Nondiscrimination/Harassment Policy notes specific identities</li> <li>• Individual teachers, counselors, etc. addressing issues of diversity</li> <li>• Multilingual communication with parents</li> <li>• Family Learning Series</li> <li>• Avenues for communication of expectations</li> </ul>
	Develop district and site equity coalitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ALL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of some existing challenges</li> <li>• Board and district commitment</li> <li>• Individual teachers, counselors, etc. addressing issues of diversity</li> </ul>
	Review and revise district and school policies, documents and forms for inclusion, consistency and clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language on documents and forms needs greater consistency, clarity, and inclusivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board and district commitment</li> <li>• Nondiscrimination/Harassment Policy notes specific identities</li> </ul>

PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY	Regularly train board members, district leadership and all school site staff and faculty in restorative practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inconsistent and/or unclear discipline policies and procedures</li> <li>• Offensive language</li> <li>• Disparate student outcomes</li> <li>• Bullying reported</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District-wide shift from zero tolerance</li> <li>• Social emotional learning training provided</li> </ul>
	Hold recurring in-depth training for board members, district leadership and all school site staff and faculty on culturally responsive and sustaining education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture of fear and/or silence</li> <li>• Limited staff knowledge of culture/history of diverse groups</li> <li>• Disparate student outcomes</li> <li>• Differentiated classroom and school-level supports needed</li> <li>• Faculty perceptions of colorblindness and assimilation</li> <li>• Some elementary school events center a European-American viewpoint</li> <li>• Gendered family events exclude diverse family structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty acknowledge importance of diverse materials</li> <li>• Faculty comfortability/confidence in managing certain aspects of a diverse classroom</li> <li>• Social emotional learning training provided</li> <li>• Individual teachers, counselors, etc. addressing issues of diversity</li> </ul>
	Provide ongoing professional development and technical assistance on differentiated instruction for all teachers (including strategies for supporting students with disabilities and English learners)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disparate student outcomes</li> <li>• Differentiated classroom and school-level supports needed</li> <li>• Need for greater inclusion of students with disabilities</li> <li>• Academic pressure remains intensely high</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High academic achievement</li> <li>• Heterogeneous groupings for class activities and projects</li> <li>• Social emotional learning training provided</li> <li>• Individual teachers, counselors, etc. addressing issues of diversity</li> </ul>
	Encourage and incentivize staff and faculty completion of courses about the history and culture of diverse groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited staff and faculty knowledge of culture/history of diverse groups</li> <li>• Greater diversity needed within the curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty acknowledge importance of diverse materials</li> </ul>
	Conduct HR equity audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited diversity of staff and faculty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board and district commitment</li> </ul>
	Develop, and hire for, a senior district administrator role to spearhead and oversee efforts to ensure district-wide diversity, equity and inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ALL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board and district commitment</li> <li>• Individual teachers, counselors, etc. addressing issues of diversity</li> </ul>

PARENT & COMMUNITY TIES	Host DEI-related educational sessions for families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family education and collaboration needed</li> <li>• Increased communication</li> <li>• Culture of fear and/or silence</li> <li>• Offensive language</li> <li>• Empathy development needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Learning Series</li> <li>• Multilingual communication with parents</li> <li>• Events created to highlight diversity</li> </ul>
	Collaborate with local organizations and nearby school district(s) to increase students' engagement with, appreciation of and empathy for people with varied backgrounds and perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited diversity of students</li> <li>• Limited diversity of staff and faculty</li> <li>• Feelings of exclusion within greater La Cañada Flintridge community</li> <li>• Empathy development needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing relationships with community organizations</li> </ul>
	Disseminate, collect and analyze exit surveys for families choosing to leave the district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited diversity of students</li> <li>• Disparate student and family outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multilingual communication with parents</li> <li>• New family outreach (e.g., PTA Korean Outreach)</li> </ul>
STUDENT CENTERED LEARNING CLIMATE	Implement <i>Responding to Hate and Bias at School</i> and <i>Speak Up at School</i> protocols at each site, including training for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture of fear and/or silence</li> <li>• Offensive language</li> <li>• Empathy development needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual teachers, counselors, etc. addressing issues of diversity</li> <li>• Avenues for communication of expectations</li> </ul>
	Host focus groups with subgroups of students and families experiencing disparate outcomes (e.g., related to attendance, academics, discipline, school climate, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disparate student and family outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of clubs, classes and organizations</li> <li>• Growing emphasis on social-emotional learning</li> <li>• Multilingual communication with parents</li> <li>• New family outreach (e.g., PTA Korean Outreach)</li> </ul>
	Employ district-wide restorative justice policies and structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inconsistent and/or unclear discipline policies and procedures</li> <li>• Offensive language</li> <li>• Disparate student discipline outcomes</li> <li>• Bullying reported</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District-wide shift from zero tolerance</li> <li>• Nondiscrimination/Harassment Policy notes specific identities</li> <li>• Growing emphasis on social-emotional learning and wellness</li> </ul>

	Conduct regular, disaggregated review of early warning system indicators at each school site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disparate student outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District-wide shift from zero tolerance</li> <li>Growing emphasis on social-emotional learning and wellness</li> </ul>
	Facilitate the formation of affinity groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited diversity of students</li> <li>Limited diversity of staff and faculty</li> <li>Disparate student and family outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual teachers, counselors, etc. addressing issues of diversity</li> <li>Growing emphasis on social-emotional learning and wellness</li> <li>New family outreach (e.g., PTA Korean Outreach)</li> <li>Existence of clubs, classes and organizations</li> </ul>
INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE	Analyze curricular materials to determine the extent to which they align with the District's commitment to and vision for DEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater diversity needed within the curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual teachers, counselors, etc. addressing issues of diversity</li> <li>Some curricular materials and subjects foster the introduction of diverse perspectives</li> </ul>
	Review the special education referral and (re)classification process at each site, including current general education interventions employed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differentiated classroom and school-level supports needed</li> <li>Need for greater inclusion of students with disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High academic achievement</li> </ul>
	Include courses that highlight the experiences of historically marginalized groups (e.g., Asian studies, African American history, Chicano studies, LGBTQ studies, ethnic studies, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited student diversity</li> <li>Greater diversity needed within the curriculum</li> <li>Empathy development needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual teachers, counselors, etc. addressing issues of diversity</li> </ul>
	Incorporate and prioritize varied assessments and opportunities to demonstrate diverse modes of learning and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic pressure remains intensely high</li> <li>Disparate student outcomes</li> <li>Differentiated classroom and school-level supports needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual teachers, counselors, etc. addressing issues of diversity</li> <li>Growing emphasis on social-emotional learning and wellness</li> </ul>

## Explanation of Recommendations

At the time of the creation of this plan, La Cañada Unified School District, along with many districts throughout the country and world, has closed all school sites in response to the coronavirus pandemic. While this unprecedented turn of events has caused the need for priorities to shift as staff, students and families adjust to distance learning methods, it is critical that LCUSD's focus on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion not wane. In fact, the pandemic crisis has highlighted longstanding societal and health disparities along racial lines in the United States, raised concerns about the equitable implementation of remote instruction for diverse learners, and fostered a surge in anti-Asian racism—all of which have the potential to directly affect LCUSD students, families and staff (Dubose & Gorski).

Furthermore, the recent killings of Black Americans by police and neighborhood vigilantes, coupled with the resulting world-wide social unrest and uprisings, further indicate the saliency of these issues. It is the recommendation of Elliott Educational Services that La Cañada Unified take this opportunity to become even more vigilant in its quest to cultivate diverse, inclusive and equitable learning spaces—be they in-person or virtual.

The recommendations delineated in this document are not exhaustive. They are intended as initial steps that LCUSD should take throughout the next 1-3 years to begin addressing diversity, equity and inclusion in more purposeful and systemic ways. In addition, the recommendations are interconnected in many ways and should not be viewed as stringently distinct from one another (e.g., equity coalitions may take on the responsibility to conduct regular, disaggregated reviews of early warning system indicators at each school site). The exact timeline and order of the implementation of these recommendations will depend on the extent to which they align with and are incorporated into the district's general strategic planning. It is expected that through the process of implementing many of these steps, additional action items will be revealed.

Following are detailed explanations of the suggestions outlined in the Recommendations for Sustainability:

### DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

#### **Formally acknowledge, reckon with and work to heal from the role of “White flight” and systemic racism in the district’s founding**

Although there were conflicting accounts at the time of LCUSD's founding regarding the role of race in the decision to create La Cañada High School and no longer send students to the racially diverse John Muir High School in the neighboring city of Pasadena (La Cañada Valley Sun, 1960), interviews conducted with district and school staff for the Strengths and Needs Assessment confirmed that structural, anti-Black racism in the form of “White flight” was, at the very least, a factor in the decision. In order to courageously combat the current culture of fear and silence and model the principles of restorative justice, it would behoove the district to speak honestly about its past and begin the work of healing and reconciliation.

The exact steps to be involved in that process will need to be carefully considered by district leadership, in partnership with leaders from Pasadena Unified School District. However, taking such a bold step would position LCUSD to be trailblazers amongst public school districts in this country, many of whom have similar stories of their genesis. Furthermore, it would lay the groundwork for the district to implement, with integrity, restorative approaches to discipline, which are rooted in concepts of truth

telling and healing (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015). Perhaps most importantly, it would pave the way for La Cañada to begin re-envisioning what it would look like to effectively educate all of its students, this time based on tenets of diversity, equity and inclusion.

#### **Solidify and widely share District student values; DEI definitions, commitment statement, and vision**

Having clear messaging regarding a district and/or school's stance on educational equity is one of the key criteria for an equitable learning environment (Mid Atlantic Equity Consortium, 2020). Since September 2019, the district has worked with Christina Hale-Elliott to define the terms of diversity, equity and inclusion and to develop a meaningful commitment statement that aligns with La Cañada Unified School District's mission. Throughout that process, it became evident that the work would be furthered by additionally having clear student values, which every LCUSD student strives to manifest, as well as a vision of what success in this area would entail. Relaying each of these to all community constituents will go a long way towards improving communication and setting a solid foundation for the continuation of this important work.

#### **Compose and share overview of teacher expectations and rights (tied to district, state and federal policies)**

In discussing the culture of fear that many identified as being present within LCUSD, staff and faculty repeatedly requested to have a clearly articulated overview of both district expectations of them with regards to diversity, equity and inclusion as well as their own (and students') legal rights based on district, state and federal policies. This would include nondiscrimination and harassment policies. Having such transparency and clarity would serve to build greater confidence among staff and faculty as the district implores them to speak up against biased and hateful speech and broach topics that may be considered by some to be controversial.

#### **Develop district and school site equity coalitions**

Paramount to the success of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts will be the formation and training of both district and school site equity teams, comprised of a cross-section of LCUSD stakeholders. These should include district administrators, school site administrators, teachers (general and special education), counselors, students, parents/caregivers, alumni, other involved community members, etc. Equity teams will be responsible for tasks such as helping to create a vision for what effective education for all students would entail; setting specific, attainable goals with clear timelines and metrics for success; recommending culturally responsive, research-based ideas for curriculum, instruction, and programming to support the learning of diverse students; regularly disaggregating and analyzing data to determine the extent to which the needs of all students are being met; identifying and progress monitoring solutions to recognized areas for growth, etc. During the current COVID-19 crisis, the teams should pay particular attention to preventing and remedying potential inequities related to distance learning (Dubose & Gorski). In order to support the longevity of this work, it is highly recommended that staff be compensated for their participation in equity teams.

#### **Review and revise district and school policies, documents and forms for inclusion, consistency and clarity**

Language used in documents and forms by LCUSD and each of its school sites should be reviewed to ensure that it mirrors widely held and accepted preferences of specific groups. This includes the use of demographic category options and pronouns that reflect staff, students and parents/caregivers with non-binary gender identities. It also entails consistently collecting and reporting

racial and ethnic categories, using inclusive and affirming language and tailoring forms to be inclusive of diverse family structures. If utilized consistently, such language will not only serve to acknowledge stakeholders' varied identities, it will also allow for the gleaning of useful insights around the experiences of specific subgroups within the general population.

## **PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY**

### **Regularly train board members, district leadership and all school site staff and faculty in restorative practices**

Restorative approaches to school discipline emphasize the role of relationships and community, as well as the importance of repairing harm that has been done to the community (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015). In this way, the concept of discipline more accurately reflects the original etymology of the word, which is centered on instruction and teaching, rather than the common misinterpretation in which discipline is used synonymously with punishment (Yang, 2009). Although LCUSD has stated their intention to employ restorative practices, it is vital that all those taking part in the creation and implementation of district and school discipline policies be trained in the appropriate implementation of the approach so that it can be carried out authentically and meaningfully.

### **Hold recurring in-depth training for board members, district leadership and all school site staff and faculty on culturally responsive and sustaining education**

Culturally responsive and sustaining education (CR-SE) is an approach to teaching and learning that values and honors students' lived experiences and varied identities, incorporating them into every aspect of the schooling experience. Effective CR-SE requires the maintenance of high expectations and develops a critical consciousness in students to identify and disrupt inequities (Paris & Alim, 2017). Imbedded within this methodology is a belief in all students and families' humanity and worth; active rejection of notions of white supremacy and racial hierarchies (i.e., anti-racism); and a desire and commitment to disrupt the status quo. It is recommended that board members, district and school administrators, teachers, pupil personnel services, and classified staff receive ongoing training in this area to promote more inclusive and equitable learning spaces.

Educational approaches that center the many assets that students and families bring with them to school communities have been shown to increase student and family engagement and bolster academic success, among other benefits (Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017; Boykin & Noguera, 2013). Consequently, engaging culturally responsive and sustaining practices is an optimal approach in addressing identified areas for growth such as disparate outcomes within achievement, attendance, school climate, etc. Furthermore, successful implementation of CR-SE would align with two of the four key research-based ways, "that schools can cultivate a safe and supportive environment for all of their students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression" (GLSEN, para. 2). Those include developing supportive educators and implementing inclusive curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

### **Provide ongoing professional development and technical assistance on differentiated instruction for all teachers (including strategies for supporting students with disabilities and English learners)**

As student demographics change throughout the years, it is essential that educators be provided with supports to best meet the needs of all the students they serve. Data collected for the Strengths and

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<sup>1</sup> The other two recommendations by GLSEN include implementing comprehensive policies and supporting student GSAs. These are addressed within the District and School Leadership section of this document and in the Strengths section of the Strengths and Needs Assessment Report, respectively.

Needs Assessment Report revealed that teachers would benefit from additional training around planning and implementing differentiated instruction. Particular attention should be given to the incorporation of Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) strategies within general education courses to meet English Language Development (ELD) standards. Likewise, there should be a focus on utilizing a myriad of curricular tools and instructional methods to accommodate neurological diversity and support students with learning differences and disabilities.

### **Encourage and incentivize staff and faculty completion of courses about the history and culture of diverse groups**

In conjunction with the aforementioned training in culturally responsive and sustaining education, it is also recommended that the district actively promote and organize opportunities for staff to learn about varied cultural groups (e.g., Black studies, Asian studies, Chicano studies, LGBTQ/Queer studies, etc.). Such learning opportunities will allow for better understanding and empathy between staff, students and families. Moreover, broadening their understanding of the histories and lived experiences of varied groups may further empower teachers to integrate elements of students' cultures into their class curriculum and instruction (Hammond, 2015).

### **Conduct HR equity audit**

The Strengths and Needs Assessment indicated that there is room for growth in the cultivation of a workforce within the district that reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population or that of the greater Los Angeles County area. In particular, an equity-focused examination of the Human Resources Department would consider areas such as staff and faculty recruitment, hiring, retention, promotion, school and/or course placement, compensation, and discipline.

In the absence of purposeful and pointed introspection, it is likely that subconscious in-group bias can lead to the replication and maintenance of current staff demographic trends (Eberhardt, 2019). In addition to the role that implicit bias may play, it is also necessary to examine whether there are particular policies or practices in place that inadvertently privilege certain groups while putting others at a disadvantage (National Equity Project, 2019).

### **Develop, and hire for, a senior district administrator role to spearhead and oversee efforts to ensure district-wide diversity, equity and inclusion**

In order to ensure that the recommendations put forth in this plan are carried out with fidelity, and that all future decisions are considered, instituted and monitored utilizing an equity lens, LCUSD should recruit and hire a senior district administrator focused on these efforts. Although developing and maintaining a common thread of equity throughout La Cañada Unified is the shared responsibility of all stakeholders, it is important that someone be explicitly placed in the position to set a vision, develop strategies for implementation, progress monitor and evaluate the work. It is critical that the person in this role be given sufficient support, access and resources. This will go a long way towards fostering the integrity, continuity and accountability of such efforts.

## **PARENT/COMMUNITY TIES**

### **Host DEI-related educational sessions for families**

It is important that as La Cañada Unified staff and faculty expand their understandings around issue of diversity, equity and inclusion, that parents and caregivers be offered similar learning opportunities. This is particularly important given that many pointed to the potential for negative feedback from parents and caregivers as a major contributor to the culture of fear that permeates the



district. If that fear is to be eradicated, LCUSD must be clear in their commitment to the work of creating diverse, equitable and inclusive learning spaces, and they must thoughtfully engage families in their efforts to bring that vision to life.

**Collaborate with local organizations and nearby school district(s) to increase students' engagement with, appreciation of and empathy for people with varied backgrounds and perspectives**

During the strengths and needs assessment process, many pointed to the currently limited opportunities for students to engage with diverse people and perspectives. This lack of exposure could exacerbate feelings of isolation for students from underrepresented communities and perpetuate the “La Cañada bubble” that so many focus group and interview participants referenced. By connecting and collaborating with nearby organizations and schools, particularly those serving populations that vary greatly from LCUSD’s and/or those committed to issues of social justice and equity, the district can broaden all students’ learning landscapes.<sup>2</sup> Such collaboration should be facilitated in a mutually beneficial manner that recognizes the assets and potential contributions of all participants, explicitly avoiding any deficit-based approaches.

**Disseminate, collect and analyze exit surveys for families choosing to leave the district**

In speaking with parents/caregivers of current and former LCUSD students, there was repeated mention of the consideration or decision to move their children to a school outside of the district because of concerns related to diversity, equity and inclusion. Families of students from historically marginalized groups (e.g., students of color, students with disabilities, etc.) relayed this experience most often. Instituting a structured system for inquiring about the reason for students’ disenrollment in LCUSD would provide valuable data for staff and faculty looking to better understand how to support students and families.

**STUDENT CENTERED LEARNING CLIMATE**

**Implement *Responding to Hate and Bias at School* and *Speak Up at School* protocols at each site, including training for students**

As part of the diversity, equity and inclusion efforts during the 2019-20 school year, district leadership, school site administrators and certificated staff began exploring Teaching Tolerance’s resources: *Responding to Hate and Bias at School* and *Speak Up at School*. Both documents provide concrete guidelines and tools for preventing incidents of bias and hate at schools and effectively responding when and if they do occur. These resources are particularly salient given reports of offensive language by students at every school level.

Effective proactive and responsive measures to combat incidents of bias and hate should include the implementation of clear and consistent policies and structures, in alignment with the restorative justice recommendations described later in this section. They should also entail a well-defined process for notifying parents/caregivers as well as timely and transparent procedures (GLSEN). Increased consistency, transparency and communication in this area will serve to strengthen the trust between LCUSD and its stakeholders.

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<sup>2</sup> It is imperative that these interactions be initiated in tandem with or following the implementation of other recommendations intended to increase understanding and empathy and curtail the use of offensive language. It would be irresponsible to attempt to promote greater diversity and inclusion by inviting others into an environment where they are apt to experience trauma in the form of microaggressions and/or hate speech.

In the next phase of this work, it is recommended that the district integrate recommendations made within *Responding to Hate and Bias at School* into elementary and secondary Threat Assessment Team plans. Also, given that classes are currently being conducted remotely, it is advised that particular consideration be given to the unique applications of these documents within distance learning. Furthermore, it is recommended that students and staff be provided with a quick reference guide of ways to respond when and if they hear offensive language, and that they be instructed on how to implement the suggestions. For LCHS 7-12, it is suggested that student training on these topics be led by SHIFT, an organization that has already begun working with the middle school, having facilitated assemblies during the 2019-20 school year on the power and impact of language. Staff instruction would ideally be incorporated within the recommended culturally responsive and sustaining education trainings described earlier (see Professional Capacity).

**Host focus groups with subgroups of students and families experiencing disparate outcomes (e.g., related to attendance, academics, discipline, school climate, etc.)**

Although an aggregate examination of LCUSD's data reveals numerous areas of success, looking more closely at particular subsections of the community highlights that varied groups of students and families are having vastly different experiences. Conducting targeted focus groups will be an essential step in the district's re-envisioning what success for all students would entail and require. Such conversations may reveal additional opportunities and avenues for communication and collaboration with parents/caregivers, novel ideas for bridging school and home cultures, etc. It is critical that throughout this process, focus groups be viewed as an opportunity to tap into some of the district's most valuable assets: committed students and families graciously providing insights around how LCUSD staff and faculty can best be of service.

**Employ district-wide restorative justice policies and structures**

In conjunction with training all applicable stakeholders in restorative practices, it is crucial that policies and structures be put in place that reflect and support such an approach. In alignment with the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines for enhancing a school's climate (as cited in Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015), policies at the district level and at each school site should entail:

- Clear, consistent, and developmentally appropriate behavior expectations outlined using affirmative language;
- Positive behavior supports and preventative methods indicated; and
- Tiered consequences, and/or requirements for restoring impaired relationships, clearly articulated.

Integral to the success of such policies is a continual focus on equity and fairness, progress monitoring and adjusting as needed for ongoing growth. It is also vital that a clear system be in place to communicate discipline policies to students and families, as well as the protocol and parameters for reporting out district/school responses to egregious misconduct.

**Conduct regular, disaggregated review of school site early warning system indicators at each school site**

Regularly examining indicators of student engagement and success allows educators to identify important patterns and proactively address situations to prevent negative student outcomes (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015). Data should be examined at each school site on an aggregate level and also disaggregated by subgroups (e.g., by race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, English learner status, etc.) and by individual students to identify potential inequities. For particularly small subgroups of students,

multiyear data will need to be reviewed so that there is a large enough sample size to see the experiences of smaller groups and note trends over time. This review should include the examination of structures and spaces that were created to support student success and well-being (e.g., the Spartan Wellness Center) to determine the extent to which they are being utilized by all subgroups of students.

In particular, the following areas should be regularly examined:

- Attendance rates
- Discipline referrals
- Suspension rates
- School climate data
- Accelerated studies (e.g., GATE, honors, AP) enrollment data
- Course completion rates
- Achievement data

It is important to note that many of the traditional indicators of academic achievement (e.g., standardized test scores and grade point averages), have been criticized for their inability to accurately reflect student growth, knowledge and capabilities. Furthermore, the legacy of systemic racism and cultural bias is embedded within many of these measures. As award winning scholar, Ibram X. Kendi explains, standardized tests are rooted in the study of eugenics and the erroneous belief in racial hierarchies. As a result, they predictably replicate and further these foundational racist notions (2016). If achievement is to be monitored utilizing an equity lens, and honoring the district's work with Challenge Success and the growing emphasis on social and emotional growth, it is critical that alternate markers of achievement be utilized (see Instructional Guidance).

### **Facilitate the formation of affinity groups**

Family and student affinity groups allow individuals, “who share an identity—usually a marginalized identity—to gather, talk in a safe space about issues related to that identity, and transfer that discussion into action that makes for a more equitable experience at school” (Bell, 2015, para. 2). Such gatherings already exist within LCUSD, for example, in the form of the Korean PTA Outreach at the elementary level and the Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) at the middle and high school levels. However, further efforts should be made to facilitate the formation of additional groups to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE**

### **Analyze curricular materials to determine the extent to which they align with the district's commitment to and vision for DEI**

As La Cañada Unified School District works to reimagine what truly inclusive and equitable spaces would entail, critically examining curricular materials will be an important and ongoing part of the improvement process. For example, according to the New York University Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, English language arts curricula should be considered in terms of their representation of diverse characters and authors, attention to issues of social justice, and guidance provided through teacher materials (2019). Similar considerations should be kept in mind for all subject areas at all grade levels. This includes both reflecting on potential new materials and analyzing existing curriculum.

Integral to the aforementioned social justice considerations, it is recommended that curricula explicitly challenge systems of oppression, accurately and critically examine historical and present day

events and trends, and foster anti-racism. The following resources should be considered in the development/choosing of such curricula:

- [The 1619 Project](#)
- [A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America](#)
- [A Different Mirror for Young People](#)
- [Stamped from the Beginning](#)
- [Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You](#)
- [An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States](#)
- [An African American and Latinx History of the United States](#)

**Review the special education referral and (re)classification process at each site, including current general education interventions employed**

Due to the high level of expectations and academic rigor within the district, there were reports that students who might be placed in general education courses within another district are relegated to more restrictive learning environments within LCUSD, particularly at the secondary level. A comprehensive review of special education referral and (re)classification processes would reveal the extent to which these concerns are substantiated. Furthermore, by compiling an inventory of current interventions employed within general education settings, the district would better be able to assess the degree to which existing interventions are effective and sufficient.

**Include courses that highlight the experiences of historically marginalized groups (e.g., Asian studies, African American history, Chicano studies, LGBTQ studies, ethnic studies, etc.)**

In addition to reimagining and reconstructing all subject area curricula to be culturally responsive and inclusive of diverse perspectives and backgrounds, it is also recommended that specific courses be added that center the experiences of historically marginalized and oppressed groups. At the high school level, one prime way to include such courses is within 9<sup>th</sup> grade social studies. According to the *History Social Science Framework for California Public Schools*, the ninth grade year in social studies is intended for students to take elective courses, such as ethnic studies, which is recommended by the California Department of Education (McTygue & Slutsky, 2017)<sup>3</sup>. Incorporation of ethnic studies would also support recommendations put forth by the Black Lives Matter at School movement, “a national coalition organizing for racial justice in education” (2020, para. 1). Black Lives Matter at School also calls for the inclusion of Black studies, which would be particularly salient within La Cañada Unified School District due to its history. Furthermore, given the large population of Asian students and families within the LCUSD community, the incorporation of Asian studies should be prioritized.

**Incorporate and prioritize varied assessments and opportunities to demonstrate diverse modes of learning and understanding**

As was explained in Student Centered Learning Climate, there are inherent flaws within some of the primary measurements used to determine student success. It is recommended that LCUSD focus on incorporating and prioritizing assessments that allow for a wider breadth of students' skills and knowledge to be revealed through differentiated methods. This could entail for example the inclusion of more portfolio-based assessments and student-led parent teacher conferences to demonstrate both

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<sup>3</sup> Although courses such as ethnic studies are framed as electives by the California Department of Education, consideration should be given as to how the district could amplify their status. Having the histories of historically marginalized groups deemed as optional is antithetical to a commitment to equity and inclusion.

areas of achievement and areas for continued growth. As differentiation experts Tomlinson and McTighe explain, “Because students differ in their preferred way of showing what they have learned, providing multiple and various assessment types increases the opportunity for students to work to their strengths and, ultimately, the likelihood of their success” (2006, p. 63).

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